

Brittany Ferries rubbishes talk of 'terror plot'

By David Osler - Monday 16 July 2007

BRITTANY Ferries has comprehensively denied reports that a terrorist planned to blow up one of its vessels at sea with more than 2,400 passengers on board.

The story, seemingly recycled from leading Spanish daily El Pais, was branded "absolute rubbish" by a representative of the company.

The contention is seemingly supported by the Spanish government, which also issued a disclaimer. Moreover, Lloyd's List understands that Transec, the security division of Britain's Department for Transport, did not consider it necessary to issue a circular on the alleged plot.

French-owned Brittany was clearly angered by the media coverage, which it fears may have unduly alarmed passengers. A spokesman told Lloyd's List that there was no evidence for the story at all, and no additional security measures had been introduced as a result.

El Pais had claimed that Aritz Arginzoniz Zubiarre, a 22-year-old supporter of Basque separatist organisation ETA, was arrested in the Spanish city of Santander on Tuesday.

He was said to be carrying a car bomb detonator and details of two possible targets — Santander's courthouse and Pont-Aven, a Brittany vessel that serves the Santander-Plymouth route.

Meanwhile, the French authorities are said to have detained a van packed with explosives. But maritime terrorism specialists were sceptical about the story, even though ETA has previously targeted Spain's tourism sector.

One expert pointed out that the group's usual practice was to issue a warning before exploding car bombs to allow for evacuation. That would not be possible in the case of a vessel in mid-voyage.

Meanwhile, P&O Ferries said it had instigated extra vigilance on its ships but declined to discuss details.

The Department for Transport did not return a request for comment, but it appears Transec did not regard the situation as sufficiently serious to order a security upgrade on British ferries.

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